

Reincarnation under Scrutiny

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When a subject does not have a uniform doctrine, consequently, its study becomes more difficult to be undertaken. This is what happens in part with the belief in reincarnation. Despite the coinciding points among the different religions that admit it, in the details many ideas are divergent. In order to increase the divergences, many religions that believe and preach the reincarnationist belief, especially the oldest ones, do not have a schematized and official doctrine on the subject, therefore, let alone a specific literature, which provides the freedom for the creation of new interpretations, sometimes within the same tradition. In addition, different regional conceptions, transmitted orally, are common among believers in the reincarnation. The confusion increases when individuals admired as mystics, mediums, channelers, seers, and even people who claim having experienced the memory of past lives through regressive hypnosis, are constantly spreading personal experiences that bring new explanations to the reincarnationist presumption which, for believers in the phenomenon, always represent new revelations, thus forming a growing number of different understandings as to nature, cause, process and purpose of reincarnation. Some religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and Modern Spiritism) associate reincarnation (or rebirth) with the law of *karma*, others do not.

Thus, the comprehensive study on this subject, from the religious point of view, is only possible through written records, preferably from the texts where are recorded the most coincidental

reincarnationist ideas among religions and sects. Strictly speaking, most researchers agree, that reincarnation is a belief in a presumptuous fact that is embedded in yet another more encompassing belief: the rebirth. Reincarnation is not exactly the same as rebirth; the latter is a broader conception. Reincarnation is more commonly defined as the survival of an entity (soul, ego, mind, or personality) to the death of an earlier human body, which then assumes a new body still without a permanent entity, thereby assuming a new bodily life. The observation "a new body still without a permanent entity (soul)" is important, because, otherwise, the entrance of a soul into a body that already has a soul is not reincarnation properly, according to believers in this phenomenon, but incorporation or mediumistic trance. Some scholars understand that reincarnation is restricted to being reborn exclusively in a human body, never from a human body to an animal body or vice versa, so it differs from transmigration (*metempsychosis*). The rebirth is proper to Buddhism, which preaches the inexistence of a permanent soul or self (Sanskrit: अनात्मन्- *anātmān*; Pāli: अनत्ता-*anattā*; literally: non-self). Reincarnation is also different from resurrection.¹

Because they do not believe in a soul (*ātmān*) that passes from one life to another, Buddhists strive to explain who carries the *karma* from one life to the next one, since there is no soul (ego, self, mind or personality) responsible for this

¹ For an overview of the different conceptions of rebirth and reincarnation, see: McClelland, 2010: 218-32 and *passim*.

task, as in the conception of reincarnation. Buddhist canonical texts are contradictory on this subject, which sparked a heated discussion between Buddhist interpreters and critics (for a discussion of the subject, see McClelland, 2010: 226-8). Unlike the reincarnation process only among humans, Buddhists believe that an individual who has not attained liberation (*nirvāṇa*) may be reborn in any of the following six kingdoms: in the realm of the gods (*devas*), in the realm of the demigods (*asuras*), the human beings (*manushyas*), the animals (*tiryak*), the hungry spirits (*preta*) and the inhabitants of hell (*nāraka*). The liberation (*moksha*, *nirvāṇa*) of the cycle of births and deaths (संसार-*samsāra*), whose mechanism is rebirth (पुनराजाति-*punarājāti* - lit: born again), is the goal of human life according to the Indian religions.

The Diffusion

Many authors agree that one of the reasons for the emergence and proliferation of religions was humanity's dissatisfaction with the ephemerality of life, because it is impossible to achieve all that is desired and to correct all failures in one life. Thus, belief in reincarnation has been, and continues to be, a hope and comfort for those who are discontented with the brevity of a single life. If it were possible for people to choose between non-existence and the existence of reincarnation, surely this latter alternative would almost unanimously be chosen as the most preferred, although many did not believe in the reality of rebirth, yet they would like reincarnation to exist. This explains why religions could arise and,

consequently, thrive more to meet the desires of the heart than to answer the questions of reason. Therefore, we find that the religions that grew more lasted more were those that best attended the human anguishes, and the nearness of death and the brevity of life have always been two strong afflictions of humankind. Therefore, belief in reincarnation comforts this affliction and fuels the hope of many religious.

If one takes into account the number of religious in the world rather than the number of religions, belief in reincarnation will not seem so popular today, since the two religions with the largest number of followers today, namely Christianity and Islam, almost half the current world population, do not accept this doctrine. However, on the contrary, if one considers the number of religions, current and past, rather than the current number of followers, the result will be that belief in reincarnation has been and remains a nearly common idea among religions. Therefore, those who live in regions where biblical cultures predominate (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) are not able to perceive the dimension of reincarnationist belief. Since almost half the world population today is Christian and Muslim, the impression is that belief in reincarnation is an idea almost forgotten. However, the reality is quite different, since except for biblical religions, almost all others, whether traditional or recent, believe in reincarnation or some form of rebirth after the biological death of the body, so that it is possible to say that when taken in view of the remote antiquity and diversity of religions, reincarnation was and still is a widespread belief. It seems that, of all religions,

nowhere has it been more emphasized than in Hinduism, in which it has surpassed the religious sphere to regulate even the civil (social, conjugal and professional) life of the castes.

Biblical religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) believe in the resurrection of the dead, a process different from reincarnation, whose body will be resurrected at some point in the future to be judged on the Day of Judgment. However, few know, but some sects within these biblical traditions have believed and some still believe in reincarnation. For example, in Judaism, Hasidism and some cabalistic currents (especially the school of Isaac Luria) preach the doctrine of reincarnation. The *Zohar*, one of the most important cabalistic texts, deals with the reincarnation of souls (*gilgul meshamot*). The cabalistic current that most emphasizes reincarnation is the school of *Issac Luria* (1534-72c.e.) and the works dealing exclusively with this subject are the *Sefer ha-Gilgulim* (the Book of Reincarnations) and the *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim* (the Gate of Reincarnations), both compiled by his disciple *Haim Vital* (1543-1620c.e.). The cabalistic term for reincarnation is *gilgul* (plural: *gilgulim*), which literally means twirl.² In Christianity, the Gnostics, the Cathars, the Paulites and the Bogomils believed in reincarnation until the extermination of these groups by order of the Inquisition in the late Middle Ages. Reincarnation is a central theme in Christian Spiritism today. In addition, in Islam, some Sufi currents, especially Indian ones, believe in

² In one sense, it resembles the idea of *samsāra* (cycle of births and deaths) of Hindus, Jains and Buddhists.

reincarnation.³ The *Shia* sect *Ismaili*, influenced by Gnostic ideas, recognizes reincarnation, whose term is *tanasukh* (for an overview on the numerous religions that believe and preach reincarnation, the most comprehensive work is McClelland, 2010).

The Arguments Pros and Cons

Analyzing all the justifications for and all the justifications against reincarnation would require a much more extensive study than this one, so that only the most common ones will be selected here. Of all the arguments to justify the necessity of reincarnation, presented by the followers of this belief, the recurrent one is that without reincarnation life would be an injustice. Because, as is well perceived, it is not possible for an individual to pay for all immoralities and all the crimes committed in a single life, and there is not enough time for one to receive all the rewards for his good deeds in the same life. So that the effects would have to be fulfilled in the next incarnations, pay for the crimes or be rewarded for the virtues. By this view, belief in reincarnation is only conceived in association with divine justice or with the law of *karma*. This is the main argument of religions with the most elaborate reincarnationist doctrines.

The skeptics' counterargument to this view is that it is an exclusively religious explanation, since one must first believe in the existence of god or the law of *karma*, and then believe in the existence of reincarnation. In other words, this is an argument from the religious point of view, which

³ Many Muslims regard Sufi sects as heresies.

makes no sense from the philosophical or scientific point of view. In addition, since skeptics understand that religions are human creations, religious morality is also a human creation, so it cannot be projected as a divine or *karmic* morality. In so arguing, reincarnationists are attributing to god or to a higher law (law of *karma*), i.e., a morality and a notion of justice that humanity has invented and developed. Ultimately, what reincarnationists are doing is projecting to God or to the law of *karma* their own moral longings and justice, because of the frustration of their expectations.

Another frequent argument, especially of the Indian religions and Spiritism, is that reincarnation exists to impel the spiritual evolution of humanity, in order to attain higher levels of existence or liberation from the cycle of repeated births (*samsāra*). This is a conception that understands that life is suffering, so the need to seek another reality. These religious think that full happiness is only achieved when we reach *nirvāna* (Indian religions) or when we are taken to higher worlds (Spiritism).

The counterarguments are that, firstly, it is not accurate to say that life in general is suffering, for there are happy individuals who do not feel the need to seek an escape from the reality in which they live. Hence, skeptics sometimes define religion as the culture of the unfortunate or as the shelter of the depressed, in the ideological and institutional senses respectively. Secondly, we know that religions, from the outset, are the greatest creators of meaning and purpose for life, for the world and, above all, for the human experience. For the skeptics, the meaning and purpose created by

religions are not in nature and in life, but only in religious culture, that is, in the imagination of believers. Therefore, to believe that the purpose of life is to perfect oneself spiritually in order to attain liberation is an idea based on a meaning and purpose created by religious speculation based on the longings of well-being and happiness of the unfortunate delirious

Below are a few more pros and cons arguments of lesser occurrence, but that are also interesting.

1.Pro: Communication with the dead, remembering past lives, experiences of out-of-body awareness and near-death are examples of something that survives after death.

Con: For all these cases, scientists claim that there are explanations that are not supernatural and do not represent a mediumistic or clairvoyant factor.

2.Pro: Belief in the afterlife can reduce or even eliminate the fear of death.

Con: Such a belief, on the contrary, can make death an even more feared fate, if such a person believes in the eternal punishment in hell.

3.Pro: The soul must survive in order that life has a meaning.

Con: There are thousands of people who do not believe in surviving the soul after death and still lead a very meaningful life.

4.Pro: Belief in the afterlife increases the moralization of society, especially when it includes belief in a god as a judge or in the law of *karma*, which punishes for crimes and rewards for virtues.

Con: This belief can create an extremely repressive society, which may justify the persecution of

heretics, witches, homosexuals and those who do not conform to this ideology.

5.Pro: Belief in punishments and rewards in the next lives helps in tolerance for injustices, especially with the hope that criminals will be punished and the righteous will be rewarded in the next lives.

Con: Belief in punishment in the next life encourages more complacency with crime than the effort to fight it.

6.Pro: If there is an all-powerful god, what is the reason for giving birth to such a complex creature, such as the human being, so that it lives only a few days or only a few hours and then passes away? This is a waste of effort for nothing.

Con: This argument depends on the belief that there is a god who creates human beings, so that it is an argument based on a dubious existence (god), to justify an also dubious fact (reincarnation).

7.Pro: If humans share with God the similarity of their own image, why do not they share with God also the similarity with eternity?

Con: This question initially depends on the solution to the question of the existence of god, so that it is not possible to explain a doubt through another doubt (to know a more numerous collection of arguments pros and cons, see, McClelland, 2010: 8; including a collection of 61 arguments for rebirth, pp. 25-8, whose own author acknowledges the naivety of some of them, p.25).

The Skeptics' Explanations

The alleged cases of past-life experience are interpreted by skeptical psychologists as:

1. Cryptomnesia: event that was so hidden in memory that when it is remembered, it leads the individual to believe that it is an experience of a past life.
2. *Déjà vu*: disturbance of memory that leads the individual to believe to have seen or lived something or situation of fact, hitherto absolutely unknown or new to itself.
3. Very lucid dream: dream with such intensity and lucidity that leads the individual to believe that it is the vision of a past life.
4. Fraud: an individual who pretends to have previous life experience in order to take personal advantage.
5. Multiple personality: delusions experienced by individuals suffering from multiple personality disorder.
6. Personal myth in past-life therapy: A patient who creates a personal myth from the strength of the hypnotist's suggestion during the hypnotic regression session.
7. Cultural conditioning: an individual who is so influenced by the reincarnationist culture that invents its own history of reincarnation.
8. Dramatization: an individual is so eager to dramatize that he invents a role-playing fantasy in a previous life.
9. Screen memories: false memories produced by the unconscious mind in order to protect the conscious mind from remembering any event that is too dramatic or unpleasant for the individual to consciously bear and
10. Honest lies: Patients under past-life hypnosis are lying unconsciously, depending on the strength

of the hypnotist's suggestion (McClelland, 2010: 218; for deepening, see: Baker, 1992: *passim*).

The Ian Stevenson's Research

The discussion about the existence or not of reincarnation extends for centuries. Among the arguments mentioned above, some are just theories while others are examples drawn from experiments independent of the methods of scientific certainty. From the last century, academic researchers dissatisfied with the insufficiency of evidence presented by adepts and speculators have decided to investigate the hypothesis of reincarnation using scientific methods. Then, through different means of occurrences were investigated, such as regression of past lives through hypnosis, xenoglossy, memory of past lives by psychics and reports of children up to five years of age on previous life experiences. Ian Stevenson (1918-2007), a psychiatrist at the University of Virginia, USA, therefore received great notoriety for his investigations by researchers and parapsychologists, who came closest to recognition in the academic world, so that his research is quoted in almost all studies and discussions about the attempt to confirm the reality of the hypothesis of reincarnation through scientific methods. During the stage of choosing the safest means of evidence, Ian Stevenson suspected of hypnotic regression, claiming that "in most of the reported cases of this procedure, the personality of the previous life is a kind of historical novel, much is impossible to verify and probably fiction, and what is possible to verify is usually attributed to information extracted from

reading, radio, television or other normal sources". However, even so, he noted that "systematic research with hypnotic regression deserves encouragement" (Stevenson, 2005: 224-5). For him, "the best evidence to support belief in reincarnation comes from the cases of young children who, between the ages of two and five, make statements about a reincarnation, life they lived before they were born" (ibid.: 225). He claimed that cases like these could be found in many parts of the world, with more than 2,500 of them already being investigated. According to him, four traces occur regularly, what he called "universal traits". These are: the report still in the tender age (2 to 5 years) on the previous life; a forgetfulness of the memories described between the ages of 5 and 8 years; a high incidence of violent death in the supposed previous life and the mention of the way of death (ibid: 225).

Of the many extant accounts, Stevenson systematically investigated and published the results of only twenty cases in his book *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, first edition 1966, modified second edition 1974. In this book, he spent some initial pages describing his careful method of collecting data and interviewing children, family members, relatives and friends, and interviewing the families whom the children claimed to be reincarnations, always accompanied by translators and assistants, in order to avoid failures and simulations (pages 04-14 and 17-9). After being accused by criticism that his investigations were conducted in countries with a strong influence on the reincarnation, so they could be stories invented by relatives and taught to children, he published a

book with only cases of reincarnation in Europe, where reincarnationist culture does not predominate. As well as, he has published other cases by the publisher of the University of Virginia, also in newspapers, academic magazines and parapsychologic journals. His dedicated and systematic research has become well known and is therefore mentioned in almost all works that discuss reincarnation from a rational and scientific perspective (to know a list of his publications, see: Stevenson: 2005: 232).

Stevenson considered as strong evidence of reincarnation cases of children born with scars and birthmarks in the same place where the deceased was hit at the time of death. For example, if the deceased was shot dead in the chest and the child claiming reincarnation was born with a bullet wound in the same spot, for Stevenson, then, this was the most concrete proof that it was a reincarnation event. He consulted the autopsies of all the deceased and confirmed the truth (Idem: 226). In contrast, those who are suspicious of Stevenson's research suspect that these scars or birthmarks are made by the parents themselves, right after the child's birth, when the child is still unable to understand the forgery, in order to prepare the scenario for the future story of reincarnation.

The Responses

Despite the detailed description of his research methods, Ian Stevenson has been the subject of criticism since his first publications. The situation worsened from the revelations of one of his

former assistants, Champe Ransom, whose charges cast doubt on Stevenson's methodology. Ransom revealed that:

1. Stevenson used to ask "selective questions" to the subjects in such a way that they gave answers that he wanted.
2. Question periods were too short for a full investigation to be possible.
3. There had been too much time between the occurrences of past lives reincarnation and their investigation.
4. The imaginative capacity of children was not well explored.
5. There was a tendency on the part of Stevenson unconsciously "to fill in" an investigated story in order to make it more complete.
6. There was too much trust in potentially biased witness.
7. There was the fact that, in 90% of the cases surveyed, the children's families who remembered the reincarnations had already met the families of the deceased before the start of Stevenson's research, which raises the suspicion that the reports were previously combined and refined among the families, hence the reason for the matching responses (McClelland, 2010: 262).

However, it must be made clear that Ian Stevenson never openly asserted that his research proved the existence of reincarnation, but that it was only "cases suggestive of reincarnation", just as the terms used by him in some of his publications. On the other hand, the more severe critics of his work claim that their results do not even reach the preliminary level of suggestion, because of the precarious level of scientificity. In addition, for other

critics, the research work on reincarnation so far carried out is pseudoscience, therefore included in the encyclopedia *The Skeptic Encyclopedia of Pseudoscience*, edited by Michael Shermer (Molé, 2002: vol. I, 203-8), and in the book *Pseudoscience and the Paranormal*, authored by Terence Hines, p. 116-20.

Ian Wilson was also suspicious of some Stevenson researches, claiming that in many cases the children who claimed to be reincarnations were from poor families, while those of the deceased reincarnating in these poor children were from wealthy families. He then justified that "in countries filled with so many poor it is not difficult to guess why. Therefore, in India or Sri Lanka, a poor family has much to gain and little to lose if they represent their son as the reincarnation of a recently deceased member of a wealthy family. If the rich family is persuaded to believe the allegation, it will be unlikely to let their unlucky deceased continue to suffer in their new incarnation. Parents (of the rich family) will try to do something to improve the lot of the child and the whole poor family" (Wilson, 1989: 33-4 and Kelly, 2004: 90-1). In other words, a clever trick to wring money from a wealthy family in Eastern countries, where belief in reincarnation is a cultural conditioning.

Wilson also suspected the following reincarnationist history accepted and described by Stevenson (1974: 91-105). It is the reincarnation of a six-year-old boy, Ashok Kumar, better known as Munna, murdered with a knife cut on the throat on January 19, 1951, in a district of the city of Kanauj, Uttar Pradesh State, India, who reincarnated, just six months after his death, in the body of the boy

Ravi Shankar. Both families lived only half a mile away from each other. Ravi Shankar claimed to be Munna's reincarnation, spoke of his toys, described in detail the event of the murder by two men, etc. When the father of the late Munna, Sri Jageshwar Prasad (barber by profession), found Ravi Shankar, confirmed that everything he said corresponded to his son, so he believed in the reincarnation of his son in Ravi Shankar. Two suspects in the killing, Jawahar and Chaturi, were arrested but later released for lack of evidence. However, Ian Wilson noted that "no fewer than three family neighbors (of Ravi Shankar) testified that the child had been taken by the father to be trained by barber Jageshwar Prasad, before making allegations of reincarnation, contrary to Ravi Shankar's father's claims that he (Ravi Shankar) and Jageshwar Prasad never had met before (...). By virtue of Jageshwar Prasad's ardent desire to bring his son's murderers to justice again, it is too easy to see the story of Ravi Shankar as a maneuver between Jageshwar Prasad and the father of Ravi Shankar to get the suspects, Jawahar and Chaturi, to be arrested again. The birthmark, which Stevenson describes as very similar to a healed wound, may very well have been purposely created as additional proof" (Wilson: 1989: 34-5; see also, Stevenson: 1974: 104 and Kelly: 2004: 91).

Another suspicious case was that of a poor boy, Sunil Dutt Saxena, who claimed to be the reincarnation of the wealthy Seth Sri Krishna. Ian Wilson noted, "The family of Seth Sri Krishna was not convinced, but Stevenson was convinced of the authenticity of this case of reincarnation. Despite being informed by the doctor that one such Sheveti

Prasad had trained Sunil, to pretend that he was Seth Sri Krishna reincarnated. Stevenson preferred to view the doctor as a suspect, concluding, against all odds, that the case was genuine ..." (Wilson, 1989: 34; see also Kelly: 2004: 91).

Those who reside or have lived in India know that reports of reincarnation exist in the thousands there; almost every family has a case to tell you. The stories are so popular that they are turned into film. The best known internationally is *Manika: Une Vie Plus Tard* (1989), screenplay and direction by François Villiers, about the case of Shanti Devi, a 10-year-old poor girl (Manika, played by Ayesha Dharker), born in a village of fishermen in southern India who claimed to have visions of her former life as a wealthy woman in Nepal. Helped by her teacher, Father Daniel (Julian Sands), the only one who believed in her reports, she flees home to Nepal, a journey of about two thousand miles. The film won the *Prix du Public* in Cannes. This case is mentioned in the publications of Ian Stevenson (1974: 17; see also A.S.P.R, vol. 54, April 1960, pp. 51-71).

The weakness in Ian Stevenson's research was his excessive reliance on evidence through scars, marks and birth defects, signs of which are easily falsifiable, which makes frauds successful. He analyzed dozens of these cases in his book *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect* (1997). Well, believing that someone who died a victim of an injury will be reborn with the scar of that wound on the person's body in the next life, it can be very naive. If reincarnation really does exist, will it be that someone who also be reborn with all earrings and piercing holes, with all the warts, boils,

pimples, spots, scabs, tattoos and scratches on the body of the previous life? In addition, why only the wound of the last life? If in many previous lives he was the victim of many wounds that caused his death, will he be reborn with the sum of all the wounds of previous lives? If it is as Stevenson thinks, will someone who died run with dozens of shots, such as the executions of rival gangs, then be reborn with scores of bullet wounds scattered throughout the body? In addition, what is even more absurd and even comical, someone who died the victim of a violent auto accident, whose violence of impact ripped his head, then will be reborn in the next life with the body separated from the head? In short, Ian Stevenson thoroughly investigated many cases of reincarnation, his effort was commendable, but he neglected to investigate the cunning of the fraudsters.

The Minimalist Hypothesis of Reincarnation

Since the founding of the *Society for Psychical Research* in 1882, the first organization to conduct scholarly research on human experiences challenging contemporary scientific models, reincarnation, along with other hypothetical phenomena, has been investigated as a hypothesis and, because of the difficulty in confirming its reality, continues, even after more than 130 years, still as a hypothesis until today. However, with one detail, the hypotheses are no longer the same since the beginning of scientific investigations. With the development of the research, the beliefs that followed the hypotheses were gradually being overturned, due to the lack of confirmation,

something like a gradual emptying of theories, to the point that today we have a Minimalist Hypothesis of Reincarnation, that is, a remnant of the reincarnationist hypothesis. This remaining hypothesis is espoused by the philosopher Robert Almeder in his essay *A Critique of Arguments Offered Against Reincarnation*, published with the intention of criticizing the arguments against reincarnation presented by Paul Edwards, one of the most critical critics of reincarnation today, in his book *Reincarnation: A Critical Examination* (1996). Paul Edwards's debauched criticisms bothered Robert Almeder who, in addition to rebutting Edwards' arguments, proposed a minimalist hypothesis for reincarnation.

His hypothesis is that "there is something essential to some human personalities, which cannot be plausibly translated in terms of brain states, or properties of brain states, or biological properties caused by the brain, and also after biological death, this essential trait is not reducible, sometimes persists for some time, somehow somewhere, and for some reason or another, exists independently of the old brain and the old body of the person. Further, after some time, some of these essential traits of the human personality, for some reason or another, and through one mechanism or another, come to reside in the other human bodies, whether for some time during the gestation period, at birth or soon after birth" (Almeder, 1997: 502). This hypothesis is so minimal that it makes it vague, imprecise and indefinite, to the point that it also serves a "minimum possession hypothesis", which is something other than reincarnation, as well as, mixing Buddhist notions of rebirth, notions of

reincarnation, transmigration, possession, resurrection and, in some ways, even channeling. Vagueness and imprecision can be observed in the phrases: "something essential" (what specifically?), "some human personalities" (why not all?), "for some time" (when?), "somehow" (which), "somewhere" (where?), "for some reason or another" (what reason?), "after some time" (when?), "some of these essential traits" (which ones?), "through of one mechanism or another" (what mechanism?) and "want some time" (when?).

This hypothesis of R. Almeder is so vague that it reminds us of the language of the cold reading technique, much used by soothsayers, mediums, seers, channelers, mystics and astrologers, who use vague, imprecise and generic languages, by means of incomplete meanings, something like mere insinuation, so that the imagination of the listener or the reader completes the meaning in the way he (listener or reader) wishes to understand. In addition, when he argues scientifically, he sustains Ian Stevenson's controversial research. In addition, he criticized Paul Edwards and others for using only the "weaker cases" to criticize reincarnation, omitting the "stronger cases" (Almeder, 1997: *passim*). Now, if there are then "stronger cases" of reincarnation, and if they can be scientifically confirmed, why they are not published in major magazines such as *Science*, *Nature* and *Scientific American*, or in the books of the best universities' publishers? The answer is that the idea of reincarnation has no scientific and academic recognition until today, even after 130 years of research, only a few dying labs of parapsychology survive in some universities, where research is also

done on reincarnation, while others have been closing due to lack of satisfactory results. The last notable closure was the *Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research Laboratory* (PEAR) in 2007, after 28 years of research at Princeton University. As well as, still survive some magazines and some newspapers of parapsychology, subsidized by private initiative by those who are interested in the subject, such as the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, in which Robert Almeder published his essay.

Reality versus "Appearance of Reality"

We are unable to calculate how many times we have been surprised by the old and well-known idea: "it seems, but it is not." For centuries, the humankind believed that the sun revolved around the Earth, this was the geocentric theory. The fact that the sun appears in the east, moves to the top of the sky at noon, then sets in the west in the evening and then reappears in the east the next day, leaves the appearance of the sun revolving around a still Earth. This conception was so consolidated in the past that an art of divination was created based on the geocentric idea: the Astrology. For this culture, all celestial bodies revolve around the Earth. Until the first observers began to question this idea based on a scrutiny of the phenomenon, from there arose the theory of the rotation of the Earth around its axis and around the sun, from clues which seemed invisible to routine observation, later confirmed by astronomical observations.

Scrutiny is the starting point of scientific and police investigation, that is, investigating what

lies behind careless observation, that is, of the appearance. The word "scrutiny" (lat: *scrūtiniūm*) derives from the Latin verb "*scrūtor*", which means "to look carefully", "to examine carefully", "to explore", therefore, among other cases, it is the act of investigating a thing or a fact with attention to what lies behind the appearances. That is why science has always been an activity for a few, while religion has always been for many, because religious are content only with the "appearance of reality" in the elaboration of their doctrines. The "appearance of reality" is much easier to accept, for it is only assimilated, while the scrutiny of reality behind the "appearance of reality" requires an intellectual effort of investigation, so that reality is not assimilated, it is discovered.

Now, careful investigation of nature should not be performed in the same way as thorough investigation of human acts. For nature is deterministic, it has no free will and intention, while human behavior can be both fatalistic and intentional. Therefore, when we investigate human acts, we must take into account whenever the intentional act can be of good or bad faith, that is, moral character should not be underestimated or ignored. That is why all police investigations in the world work together with a detective department and a department of technical expertise, one assists and complements the other, that is, one needs the other. Often frauds or forgeries are so perfect that the detective needs a technical expertise to discover the fraud, while, in the same way; the police officer needs the detective's investigation to discover the bad faith behind the frauds.

The underestimation of the fraudsters' cunning in reincarnation cases was the major flaw in Ian Stevenson's research. He focused heavily on the technical and scientific side of the investigation and neglected the moral side; he investigated cases, as he was investigating nature using natural science methodologies rather than investigating man and his character. So, by understating the ability of families to defraud and emphasizing only one side of the issue, what he discovered was not exactly that there are "possible cases of reincarnation", but rather, that there are frauds that are better planned and more well executed, and others that are poorly prepared and poorly executed, hence the deceptions may or may not be discovered. Therefore, the result of his research was only that there are cases with more "appearance of reality" and others with less "appearance of reality." That is, in some cases the frame is so well planned, so well combined and executed, children are so well trained and birthmarks so well falsified that almost everyone is led to think that it is a reality, but that, in fact, these cases are just "appearances of reality" with such a high degree of ruse that are believed to be reality. Belief in these well-executed deceptions is greatly facilitated by cultural conditioning. That the cases of reincarnation in India are frauds, are already well known to the Indian police and lawyers, so that Indian court does not accept examples of reincarnation as material evidence or as testimonial evidence in the courts. The same happens in Brazil, the country with the largest population of spiritists in the world, who are fervent believers in reincarnation; also, Brazilian procedural law does

not accept cases of reincarnation or paranormality as forensic evidence. In short, to conclude, Ian Stevenson may have been a devoted scientist, but a naive detective.

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